

**Talbot County Tourism Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, March 9, 2021**  
**8:30 a.m.**

**I. Call to Order**

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at precisely 8:30 a.m.

**Board Members Present:** Judy Bixler, Kelley Cox, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Michael Hoffmann, Laura Price, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider, and Cassandra Vanhooser

**Board Members Absent:** Jessica Bellis, Harold Klinger, Amy Kreiner, and Kim Weller

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Minutes from the February meeting were presented. Michael Hoffmann made a motion to accept the minutes with corrections, noting that he did, in fact, attend the February meeting via Zoom videoconference. Kelley Cox seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**III. Old Business**

**Final Grant Summary:** Ms. Vanhooser said that she was not going to bore the group by repeating information about the grants program that had previously been reported, but that she would send out final summaries for both business and individual grants. She noted that she has checks in hand for the first round of the Talbot County Hotel and Motel Relief Fund Grant, and she showed an infographic with information taken from the grants applications that shows many restaurants are at risk of closing permanently if the pandemic drags on.

However, Ms. Vanhooser said that every indicator is pointing to a strong season ahead for tourism, and she asked others to comment. Michael Hoffmann (Bay Hundred), Angela Eade (Short-Term Rentals), and Mark Salter (Restaurants) all commented that the interest in their properties has increased, and they agree that the outlook for 2021 is looking very positive.

**2021 Travel Guide:** Ms. Vanhooser said that the work on the Travel Guide continues. She has corresponded with John Stefancik who says that sales for advertising are going

well. If you have not been contacted, you will be as she has a meeting with him this week.

**Talbot County Visitors Center:** This group has discussed the future of the Visitors Center many times over the years, Ms. Vanhooser said. This year, she included a capital request in her 2022 budget for a Visitors Center. She noted that capital enabling legislation does not commit the County; it simply opens the door for moving forward.

Ms. Vanhooser said that the current Visitors Center does not meet the needs of Talbot County and this group will be called on to envision what a new Visitors Center would look like, how it would function, how it would be staffed, and where it would be located. Clearly, this project does not take precedence over more pressing County needs including a public safety complex, but we must get the conversation started. She will send an email requesting participation in a meeting, and she will share the budget narrative she prepared for the County Council.

**Restaurant Week Promotion:** The Tourism Board had discussed the possibility of creating a Restaurant Week promotion, but had voted multiple times to wait to see how the pandemic would play out. Now that the vaccine is beginning to be more widely distributed and things seem to be opening up more, Ms. Vanhooser asked board members to make a final decision. After a great deal of discussion, the group decided not to pursue a Restaurant Week promotion in 2021. Ms. Vanhooser noted that restaurants are an important part of her advertising strategy. She is currently running a radio campaign encouraging people to get takeout from local restaurants.

#### IV. New Business

**All-American Road Designation:** Ms. Bixler said that she was proud to announce that this Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway has been named an All-American Road. Ms. Vanhooser agreed and noted that this road system stretches more than 400 miles from Chesapeake City to Crisfield and winds through every county on the Eastern Shore. She was instrumental in advocating for the designation on the federal levels.

The Chesapeake Country All-American Road was one of 49 additions to the America's Byways collection, including 15 All-American Roads and 34 National Scenic Byways in 28 states. These new designations were the first since 2009 and were made possible by Public Law 116-57, sponsored by Maryland Senator Ben Cardin, requiring the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to solicit and accept nominations to the National Scenic Byways Program.

National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads designations are awarded based on a region's archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities. The

rigorous nomination process takes months, and sometimes years, to complete. Look for more to come from this designation.

**Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe.** Ms. Vanhooser gave the group a preview of the map guide that she has been working on with researcher Priscilla Morris and contractor The Design Minds, a content-based exhibit design firm in Fairfax, Virginia. The map guide should be completed in a matter of days and will be ready for the 2021 tourism season. She also announced that delivery of the master plan is expected by the end of this week, and that she and Preston Peper, director of Parks and Recreation, have both submitted grant applications due March 8 to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority to begin work on Phase 1 of the park's master and interpretive plans. They will both be attending the Council meeting on March 9 to ask for letters of support for this project.

**TourTalbot.org Website Refresh.** Ms. Vanhooser has received a proposal from Cake & Eat It Design, the web designer for TourTalbot.org, to work on refreshing the design and functionality of the current website.

**New Hire.** Ms. Vanhooser told the Board that she and Ms. Bixler have worked with the County human resources team to identify and interview candidates for a new employee for her department. They are close to making an offer, pending reference checks.

- V. **Comments from Board Members:** Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.
- VI. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 9:26 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for April 14, 2021.